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SUBJECT: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL SECRETARY GENERAL SLAMS ZIMBABWE

SUMMARY

11. (SBU) Amnesty International (AI) Secretary General Irene Khan wrapped up a six-day visit to Zimbabwe on June 18 with a press conference where she expressed her dismay at "persistent" human rights violations in Zimbabwe. During a diplomatic briefing on June 16 that included numerous African diplomats, she called on all members of the international community to use their influence to encourage the Zimbabwean government to enact further security sector reforms and address issues of impunity. AI has a unique relationship with Zimbabwe, having defended President Mugabe and other senior ZANU-PF officials as "prisoners of conscience" during the liberation struggle in the 1970s. Because of this longstanding relationship, Khan secured meetings with a number of senior ZANU-PF officials during her visit. Khan plans to issue a report on her visit and may seek meetings with diplomatic missions at the United Nations (UN) in New York to share her findings and identify new tactics to encourage improvements in the human rights situation in Zimbabwe. END SUMMARY.

AI's 40-year Relationship with Zimbabwe

12. (U) The visit by Khan marked the first-ever trip to Zimbabwe by an AI Secretary General. In a diplomatic briefing at the Dutch embassy on June 16 and a press briefing on June 18 at a local hotel, she recounted her visit, which included appointments with a number of high-ranking ZANU-PF officials. (NOTE: In the 1970s, AI adopted then-political prisoners Robert Mugabe and Didymus Mutasa, among other combatants who are now ZANU-PF officials, as "prisoners of conscience" while they were held in Rhodesian prisons. Notably, an AI group in Sweden adopted Mugabe and demonstrated on his behalf for

much of his 11-year detention. AI's relationship with Zimbabwe began to sour in the mid-1980s when AI spoke out against Mugabe-led human rights abuses in Matabeleland. END NOTE.)

¶13. (U) During her visit to Zimbabwe, Khan met with ZANU-PF officials Vice President Joice Mujuru, Defense Minister Emmerson Mnangagwa, Minister of State in the President's Office Didymus Mutasa, and Home Affairs co-Minister Kembo Mohadi. She requested a meeting with President Mugabe, but never received an answer. She also met MDC officials including Education Minister David Coltart, Deputy Minister of Justice Jessie Majome, Home Affairs co-Minister Giles Mutsekwa, Minister of State Sekai Holland, and Speaker of the House of Assembly Lovemore Moyo. She will meet with Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai in London the week of June 22.

Khan: Human Rights Situation "Precarious"

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¶14. (U) In a statement issued on June 18, AI condemned "persistent and serious human rights violations" and the "lack of clear commitment" in the government to improve human rights in Zimbabwe. Specifically, Khan noted the continued intimidation and arrest of human rights defenders, journalists, and lawyers, the continued prosecution of numerous MPs, the stifled media environment, the inability to protest peacefully, farm invasions, and the education crisis.

¶15. (SBU) During the diplomatic briefing, Khan said that when she pushed government officials on the subject of impunity, she received

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only vague answers. She further explained that before perpetrators can be rehabilitated, there must be an end to the denial that a problem even exists. Khan said that Zimbabwe is "nowhere near ready to identify or admit what has happened."

¶16. (U) In the press conference wrapping up her visit, Khan bemoaned the lack of urgency in improving human rights and the failure to introduce security reforms. She also noted that senior government officials she met confirmed that "addressing impunity is not a priority for the government right now." Khan's press statement revealed her frustration with the government's lackadaisical attitude, "whenever we raised the issue of human rights change, the government answered that it needed more resources... Ending attacks on human rights defenders, lifting restrictions on the media, and allowing public protests do not require money - they only require political will."

¶17. (U) The local press has blasted Khan's critical assessment, calling it one-sided, damning, and hurriedly compiled. On June 19 Vice President Joice Mujuru brushed aside AI's call for addressing impunity and told the press "the people of Zimbabwe have got over their differences and have no time to waste fighting each other as they are too busy rebuilding their country."

AI Wants More UN Involvement

¶18. (SBU) In the June 16 diplomatic briefing, Khan told African and Western diplomats that she will likely present her findings to diplomatic missions at the United Nations in New York in the coming weeks. The German and Canadian ambassadors welcomed her proposal and suggested that AI recommend sending a UN political observer team to help the inclusive government improve its performance.

¶19. (SBU) The AI online report published June 18 calls on the Zimbabwean government to invite the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights to establish a presence in Zimbabwe to support human rights reform and monitor progress. The report also calls on the international community, "both African governments as well as western ones," to develop a common human rights strategy in Zimbabwe.

COMMENT

¶110. (SBU) We welcome Khan's visit and are pleased that she and her team were able to freely travel around Zimbabwe. We believe that AI's critical assessment of conditions on the ground is accurate and well-timed. Khan is right to point out that while responsibility for the vast majority of the human rights violations rests with ZANU-PF, some in the MDC are too eager to ignore these past wrongs for "political expediency." VP Mujuru's knee-jerk defensive remarks in the press are regrettable, but to be expected as Zimbabwe's human rights record is condemned yet again in the international press.
END COMMENT.

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